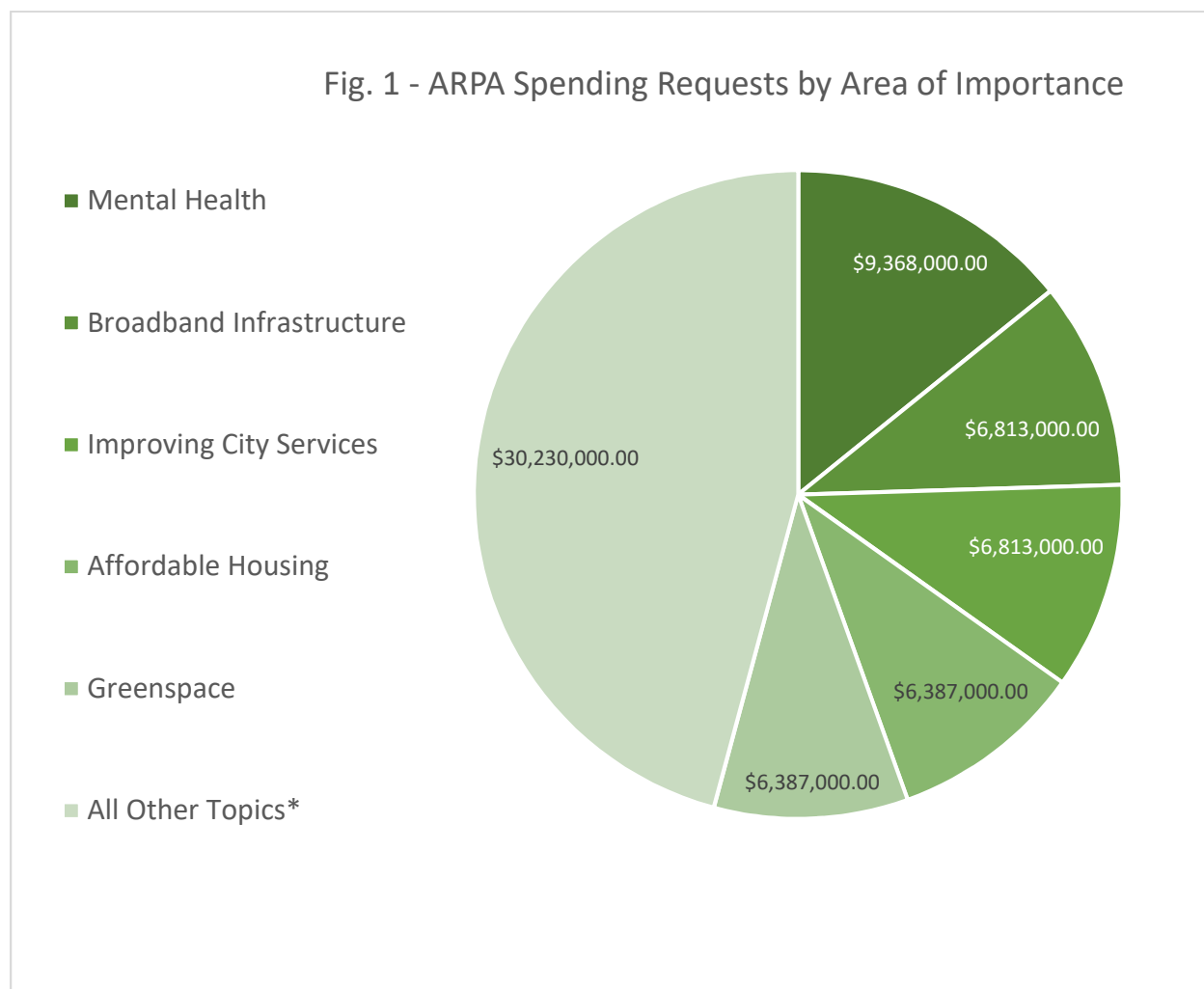


The City conducted four listening events to get public input about how to use the roughly \$76 million Lowell received through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The overall goal was to hear from residents, business owners, and non-profits about where they feel ARPA funding is needed most, or how it could be used to produce the greatest impact to the City of Lowell. The input sessions were held at the YMCA, Boys & Girls Club, Lowell Senior Center, as well as smaller venues working with neighborhood groups and the Lowell Non-Profit Alliance.

These sessions included nearly 300 participants, and represented a diversity of age groups, economic backgrounds, and neighborhoods throughout the City. Input was wide-ranging and covered topics from investing in renewable energy, to addressing food security, to providing more mental health support services, and much, much more. Attendees were also asked to apply dollar amounts to the areas of spending that were being advocated for. A ceiling of \$66 million was set as the total amount available to spend, as this is the remaining balance of ARPA funds after the City's \$10 million revenue replacement apportionment. Fig. 1 below provides a summary of the top five areas of need identified through the input, along with the amount of spending that was requested for each area.



\*Data for All Other Topics can be found on "Addendum A"

## **Breakdown - Top FIVE Areas of Need:**

As identified in Figure 1, the top five areas of need that were most frequently advocated for during the input sessions were: Addressing Mental Health, Broadband Infrastructure, Improving City Services, Affordable Housing, and Greenspace. Below is a brief summary of the public feedback and some examples of need for each of these five areas.

**Mental Health:** Out of the top 5 issues that were discussed at these listening events, “*Addressing Mental Health*” was by far the most common topic, and the most requested area of investment for ARPA funding. Services that were most identified include:

- Substance abuse counselling
- Chronic homelessness
- Domestic violence prevention and support
- Elder mental health care services
- Addressing isolation issues and general stress that resulted from the pandemic.
- Impacts of extended remote learning on school aged children
- Lack of mental health providers and/or available appointments
- Mobile mental health services for home visits, or services within the homeless community

**Broadband:** The issue with Broadband appears to be the overall high cost for the service, and a collective desire to make it more affordable, rather than claiming there is a ‘lack’ of available broadband services in the City. For many lower income families, the cost of broadband competes with other necessities like rent, electricity, or groceries. The ability to work remotely, or holding an interview over Zoom™ are now staples of the economy, as is the ability for remote learning, and many of our social interactions. In order for all people to be able to participate in this internet based model, access to reliable and affordable internet connectivity has become a requirement.

Recommendations to address this need included:

- Create programs that could address affordability (i.e. a subsidy or voucher)
- Bring in other service providers to the City to create a more competitive marketplace
- Provide broadband service as a more regulated utility, much like electricity or water
- Establish City-wide Wi-Fi services.

**Improving City Services:** Most of the requested improvements for the City were focused on providing effective/meaningful communication with the public. Areas that were identified for improvement were:

- The need for Translation services
- Hire dedicated Community outreach workers
- Better publicize current services
  - Housing assistance
  - Job training
  - Small business loans
  - Lead remediation
- Update the City’s website

**Housing:** The overall lack of affordable Housing was recognized by nearly everyone as a national concern, and not just a localized issue here in the City of Lowell. The areas of need within Housing (as identified by the public) are varied, but many felt the City could do more to address this problem. Ideas included:

- More transitional housing to assist the homeless
- More shelter space for survivors of domestic violence/trauma.
- Rental and down payment assistance to help people get into apartments
- Better protections from evictions for renters
- Better code enforcement of rental properties.
- First-time homebuyer education
- Stable elder-housing programs
- Affordable housing developments
- Micro-grants for homeowners to make necessary repairs and updates to their property

**Greenspace:** Rounding out the top five was a strong desire from the public to have the City spend ARPA money on creating new greenspaces, and/or improving upon the existing greenspace the City has. Projects that were mentioned included:

- Develop new playgrounds and splash pads (with extended hours)
- Expand walking paths and bike paths
- Create of pet-friendly parks
- Claim abandoned properties to be turned into micro-parks
- Improving the grassy areas within existing parks or creating flower garden spaces
- Planting trees along city sidewalks
- Add more outdoor seating within existing open space
- Develop greenspace around the canals
- Host community clean up events within city neighborhoods
- Schedule more frequent trash pickup in the parks
- Add lighting to parks for a safer experience during the evening

## Online Survey

Running in parallel with the listening sessions, the City also hosted an on-line survey, between April 19<sup>th</sup> and June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022. The survey consisted of six questions, (three open-ended and three closed-listed) which were aimed at obtaining feedback about ARPA in the following areas:

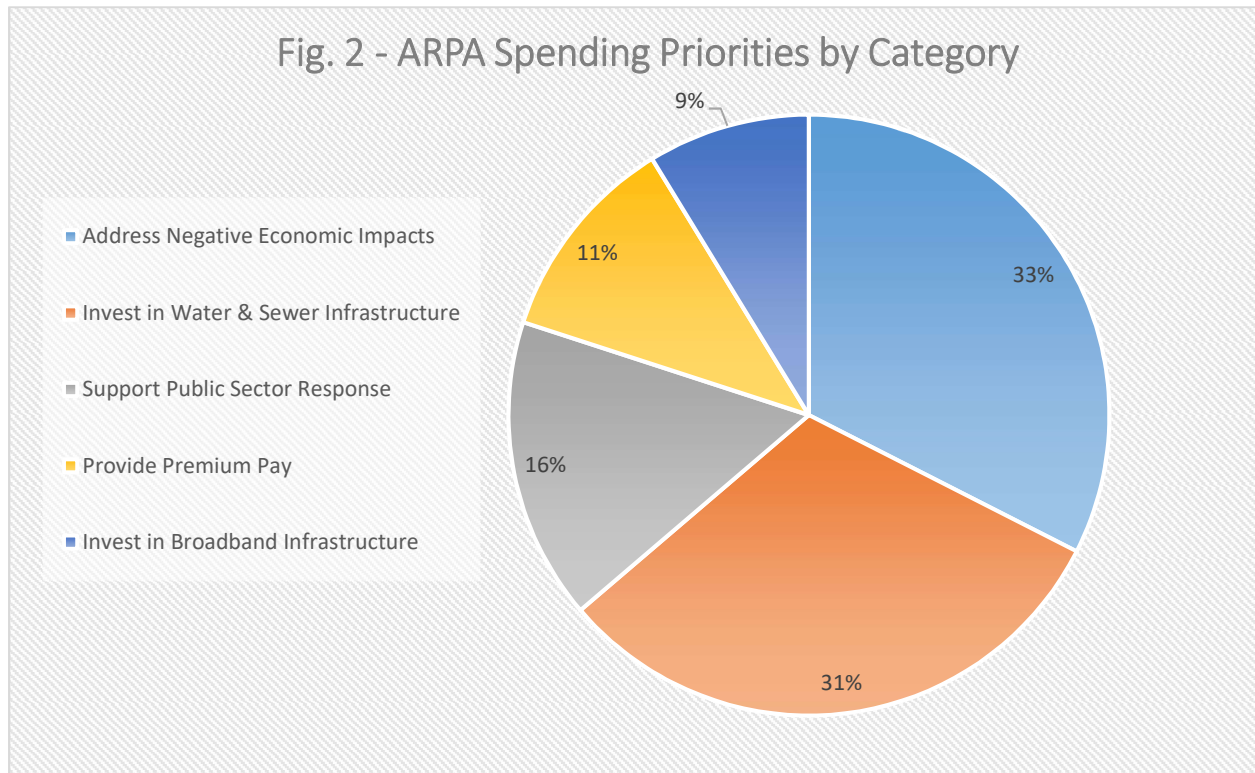
- 1) Identify which spending categories within ARPA should receive priority for funding
- 2) Identify:
  - a. The most important needs to be addressed citywide
  - b. Needs within local neighborhoods
  - c. Challenges for low-income families
- 3) Generate project ideas for the City using ARPA funds and/or other funding sources.

Eighty (80) people responded to the survey. Representation came from every neighborhood in Lowell, with a majority of respondents coming from Downtown and Belvidere (20% each).

## Survey Results:

### ARPA SPENDING PRIORITIES by CATEGORY

Survey takers were asked to identify which of the spending five (5) categories within ARPA should be the priority for the City. 33% of survey takers responded that the City should focus its spending on **“Addressing the Negative Economic Impacts”** of the pandemic, while 31% stated that **“Water & Sewer Infrastructure”** should be the area of priority. Fig. 2 (below), shows how respondents ranked spending priorities for ARPA funding.



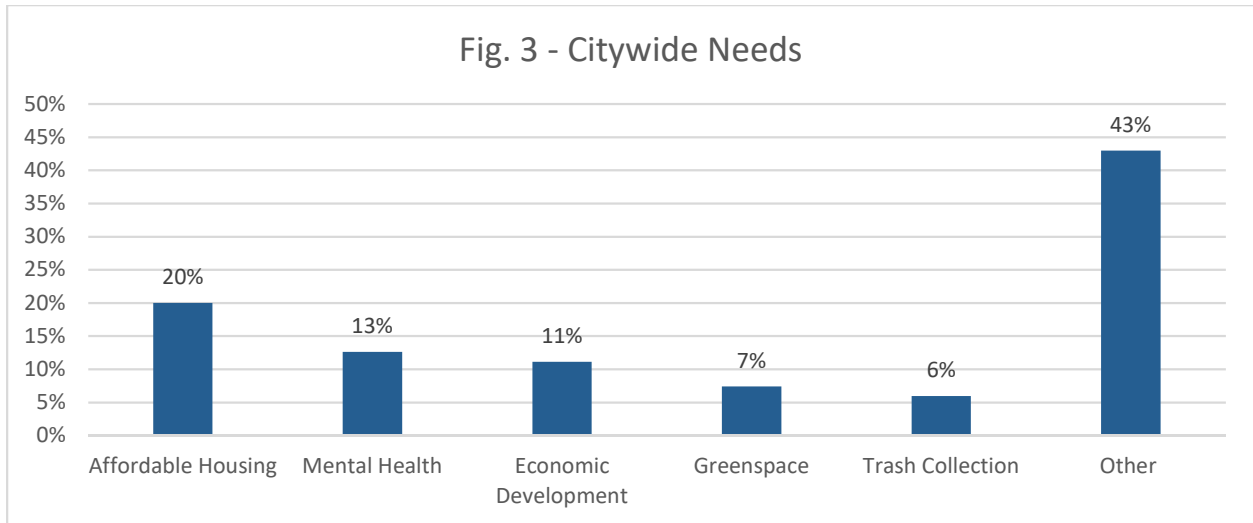
\*Breakdown ARPA spending priorities, by category, according to survey respondents

### Identifying Needs & Challenges

The survey asked respondents to identify what the most pressing needs are in the City. The responses were as follows:

- 20% of survey respondents stated that Affordable Housing is the most pressing need
- 13% stated Mental Health Services was the second most important area of need
- 11% identified Economic Development as the third priority across the City
- 7% voted for the need for Greenspace
- 6% stated Trash & Litter issues

All remaining concerns items were combined into the single group “Other”. More detail on the needs within the “Other” grouping can be found on Addendum B.



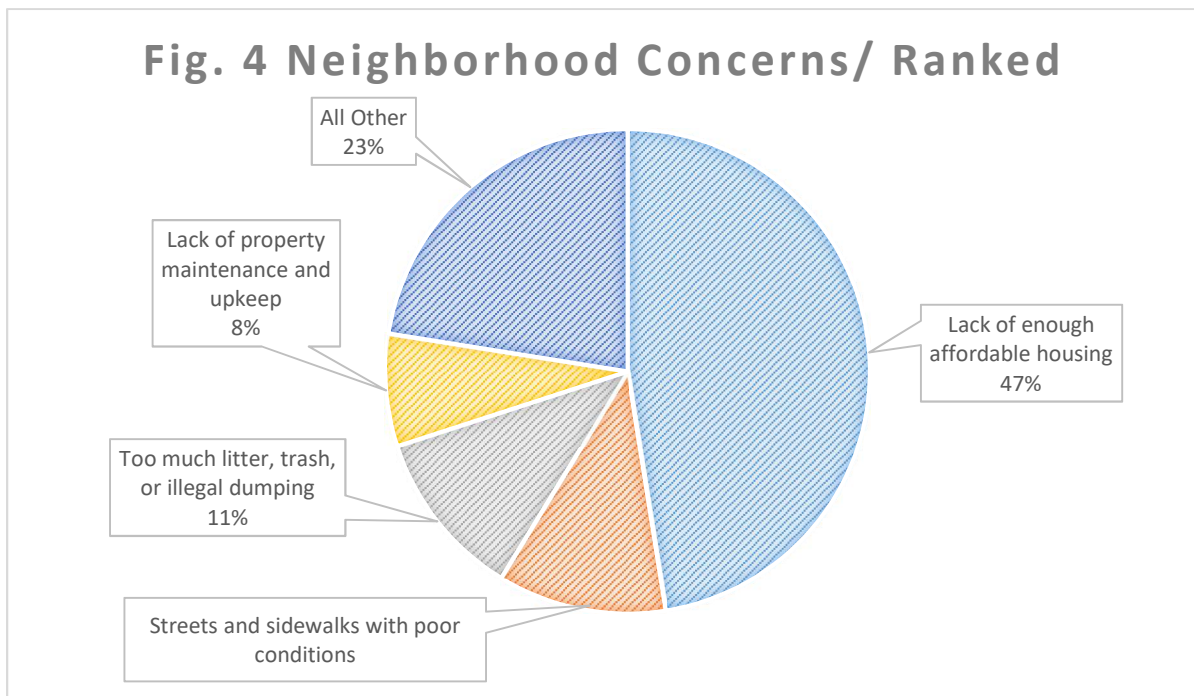
\*Figure 3 – Areas of need across the City of Lowell according to survey respondents

## LOCAL NEIGHBORHOODS

Survey takers were also asked to identify areas of need/concern within their neighborhoods.

- 47% said the Lack of Affordable Housing was considered the area of highest need.
- The condition of Streets and Sidewalks and Trash Concerns were tied for second with 11%
- A Lack of Property Maintenance was third at 8%.

The remaining neighborhood needs were combined into the single group “All Other”, (See Fig. 4 below).



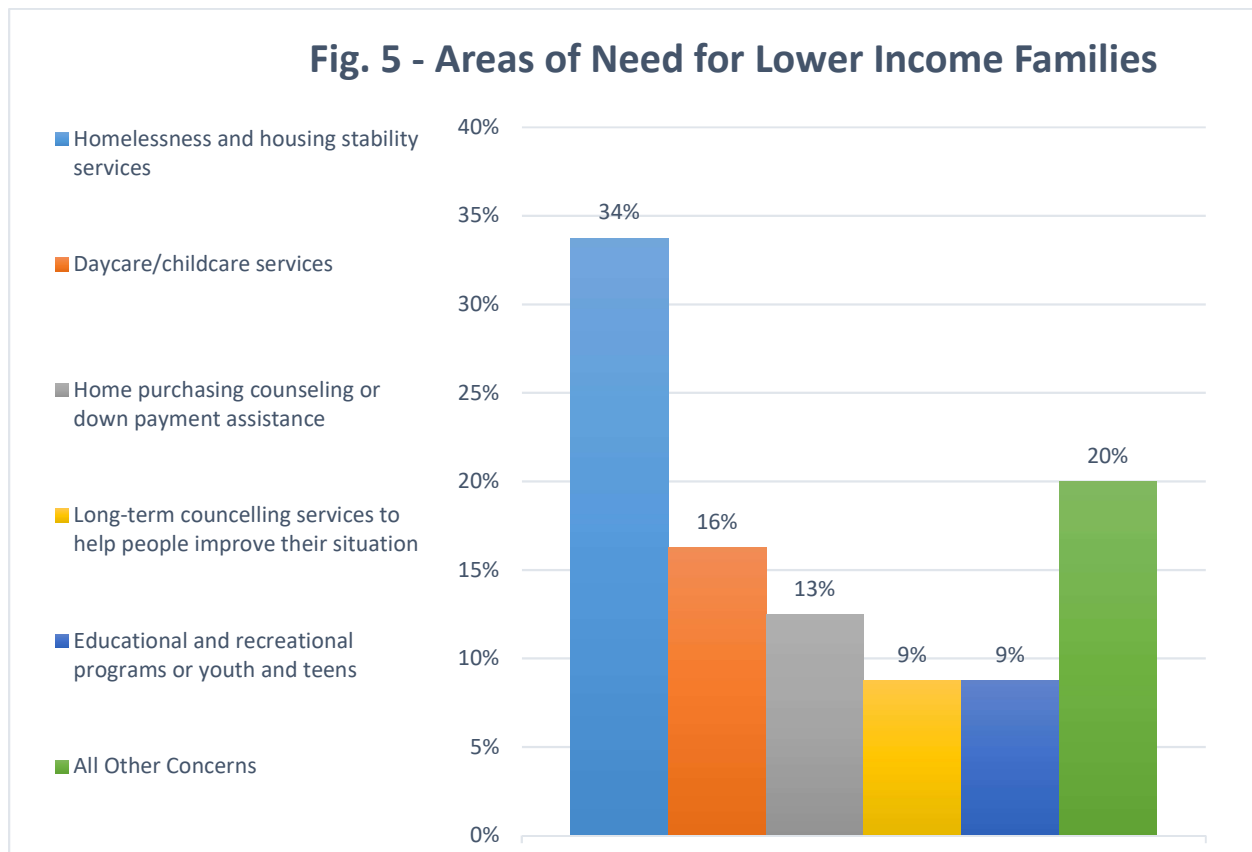
\*Figure 4 – Neighborhood needs identified by survey respondents

## LOW INCOME FAMILIES

The survey also asked respondents about the challenges that face low-income families.

Affordable Housing was ranked as the primary concern for lower income families (34%). The remaining areas of need scored as follows

- Childcare Services 16%
- Home Buying Assistance 13%
- Long-term Counselling Services 9%
- Educational/Recreational Services 9%
- All Other Concerns 20%

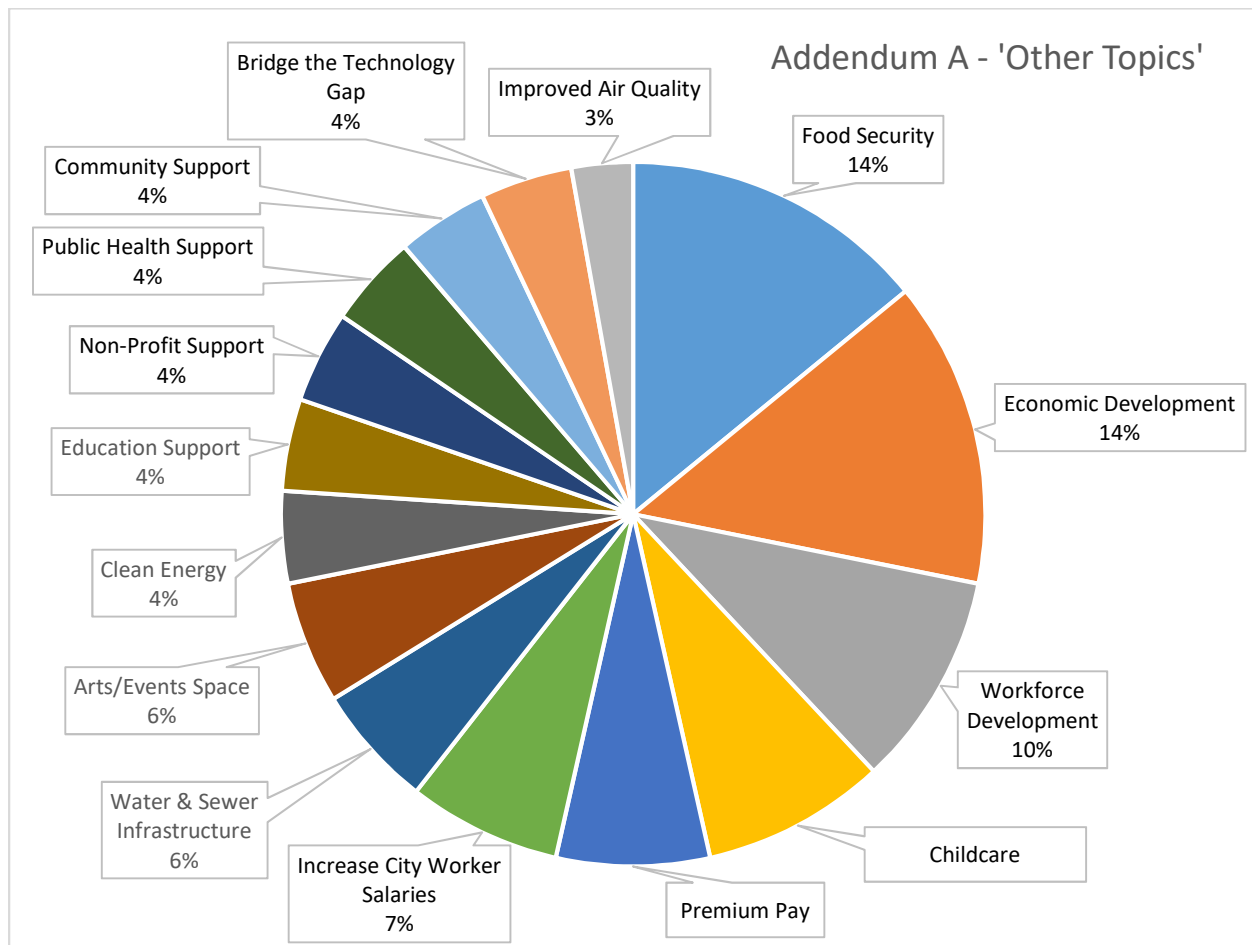


\*Figure 5 – Challenges facing Low Income Families

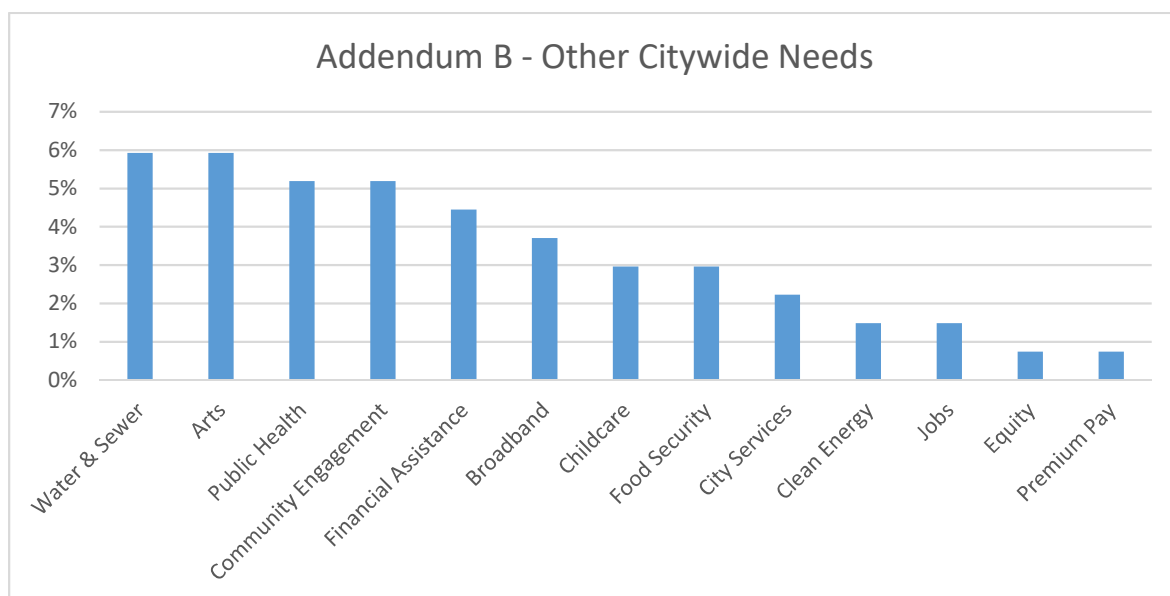
## Project Ideas

The last task we ask of survey takers was to provide project ideas that could be paid for through ARPA funding. Respondents presented 95 projects across the five (5) ARPA spending categories, along with a few that were not ARPA eligible. This project listing can be found in Addendum C.

## Addendums



\*Addendum A: Other Topics - The additional areas of need identified through public listening sessions



\*Addendum B: Other Areas of need Citywide identified through online survey

# Addendum C – Project Ideas Submitted through Online Survey

| Project Ideas Submitted for Consideration (From 4/19/22 through 6/30/22) - via Online Survey @ lowellma.gov  | Subject Count |
|--|---------------|
| <b>Address Negative Economic Impacts</b>   | <b>26</b>     |
| Investing in activities that come out of the Mosaic Lowell arts & culture plan to assist the arts & culture sector.  | 2             |
| Increase opportunity and vibrancy for residents when it comes to arts & culture programming and events.  | 1             |
| Support for city wide marketing initiatives designed to market the city and its offerings beyond festivals.  | 1             |
| Fund the food pantries which are already operating.  | 1             |
| Develop payment plans for individuals and families that fell behind on bills/payments.   | 2             |
| Create affordable housing for homeless and low income using tiny houses or small sheds in a community run settlement like Austin, TX and Seattle WA have started doing.  | 6             |
| Improve job-seeker services. Current system is cumbersome, relies on outdated websites with multiple logins, and redirects nearly all listings to publicly available postings.   | 5             |
| Support small business accross the city. Develop business districts in each neighborhood to work collectively to identify needs and solutions.   | 3             |
| Provide grants that support people over the next few years similar to other support programs that have ended, like PPP, SVOG, Expanded Unemployment, and Student Loan Repayment Delay.   | 2             |
| Hire more staff to deal with the trash that is all over the city, and hire folks who could track down illegal dumping.   | 1             |
| Make investments Downtown to create a more convenient/ inviting destination for nearby residents and students that could walk or bike to the area, rather than go elsewhere by car.  | 1             |
| More work should be put toward asking residents and business owners what they need most, along with working concurrently with the master planning committee.   | 1             |
|  |               |
| <b>Water &amp; Sewer infrastructure</b>  | <b>10</b>     |
| Create plan for CSO separation.  | 5             |
| Create incentives for residents to use less water and create low water use landscaping.  | 1             |
| Create a double tiered water system of recycled non-potable gray water and potable water.  | 1             |
| Improving energy and process efficiencies within drinking water and wastewater treatment plants.   | 1             |
| Create Rain Gardens, which could dovetail nicely with making the city more walkable and perhaps calming traffic.   | 1             |
| Upgrade old damaged pipes that cause water main breaks, and unnecessary road repairs.  | 1             |
|  |               |
| <b>Support Public Health Response</b>  | <b>29</b>     |
| Repairs and/or improvements to school HVAC systems.  | 1             |
| A homeless shelter scaled to address the needs of the city.  | 3             |
| Increase the number of SROs (Single Room Occupancy) available and encourage the homeless to use them.  | 1             |
| Provide free/affordable COVID-19 testing and vaccines.   | 4             |
| Provide support to those at high risk of COVID -19 infection.  | 3             |
| Covid-19 paid leave support/home quarantine support.   | 1             |
| More Mental Health/ Behavioral Health services available to those in need.   | 9             |
| Programs and Case Workers providing Mental Health services specifically to the homeless.   | 3             |
| The Lowell Health Department could create a general social work/mental health clinician position to help direct residents and community members when they are unsure where to start when it comes to addressing immediate  | 1             |
| Assistance with medical expenses for the elderly.  | 1             |
| Hire bilingual bicultural Community Health Workers to focus on promoting health services post COVID.   | 1             |
| Expand the health department to offer info on preventative measures, and why they are important.   | 1             |
|  |               |
| <b>Premium Pay</b>   | <b>11</b>     |
| Funding for home care workers providing 24/7 care.   | 2             |
| All health care centers, learning institutions / daycares, shelters, grocery stores, restaurants / hotels, barbers & salons, public transportation service providers.  | 5             |
| Hazard duty pay/incentives.  | 3             |
| Bonuses to the teachers and school staff who worked through the pandemic. They are the health and safety staff who handled COVID mitigation, behavioral health care and were the frontline public health response for the 14,000 Lowell Public School students.  | 1             |
|  |               |
| <b>Broadband Infrastructure</b>  | <b>10</b>     |
| End Comcast monopoly. Bring in other vendors to compete and lower prices.  | 6             |
| Provide subsidies for low income households, especially with school aged children. Provide subsidies for smart phones and wireless devices to those that cannot afford them.   | 2             |
| Either creating municipal broadband system with fiber, or provide free wifi hotspots.  | 1             |
| Create a citywide fiber optic internet service. Lowell should position itself as a business hub and the premier city for remote workers. Imaging having thousands of remote workers living and working in Downtown Lowell - who are not driving in and out of the city but are visiting Lowell businesses and restaurants daily. | 1             |
|  |               |
| <b>Non-ARPA Eligible</b>   | <b>9</b>      |
| Address the need for road repairs throughout the City.   | 5             |
| Fix ineffective traffic patterns, and place speed bumps where it makes sense.  | 2             |
| Fix sidewalks that are in disrepair and raise crosswalks for a more walkable downtown.   | 2             |
| <b>Grand Total</b>   | <b>95</b>     |